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ABSTRACT

Until recently, law enforcement and policymakers had few hard data on the child victims of sexual abuse, offenders, and other characteristics of these crimes on which to base a response. The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), capturing a wide range of information on each sexual assault incident reported to law enforcement, can provide such information. Two research bases were extracted from 1991 through 1996 NIBRS master files, one summarizing information for the 60,991 victims of sexual assault, and the second compiling information for the 57,762 victim-identified offenders. The findings indicated that 67 percent of sexual assaults are against juvenile victims. Juvenile victims of sexual assault were more likely to be male (18 percent) than were adult victims (4 percent). Juvenile victims were more likely to be victimized with others (20 percent) than were adults (4 percent). Nearly 5 of every 6 sexual assaults of young juveniles occurred in a residence, whereas crimes against older juveniles and adults were more likely to occur elsewhere. Adults were the offenders in 60 percent of sexual assaults of youth under age 12. Rarely were the offenders strangers to the victims. Sexual assaults of children under 6 years were the least likely of all such crimes to result in arrest or be otherwise cleared. (The report concludes with a list of NIBRS definitions of forcible sex offenses. An appendix discusses difficulties in data analysis when the victim's perception of the offender's age may be reported as a point estimate or as a range.) (KB)

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Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics

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Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics

by Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D.
National Center for Juvenile Justice

July 2000, NCJ 182990

A Statistical Report
using data from the National
Incident-Based Reporting System

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Howard N. Snyder

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Introduction

To law enforcement and the public, sexual assaults, and especially the sexual assaults of young children, are a major social concern. Caretakers worry about such attacks when their children are out of sight. Law enforcement, child protective services, and legislatures work to reduce the incidence of these crimes. However, while a few highly publicized incidents are engraved in the public's consciousness, there is little empirically-based information on these crimes. Until recently, law enforcement and policymakers had few hard facts on which to base their response to these crimes, their victims, and their offenders.

The only existing national data collection effort that explored the incidence of sexual assault ignored crimes against young victims. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) estimated there were 197,000 incidents of forcible rape and 110,000 incidents of other sexual assault in the United States in 1996 involving victims ages 12 or above (Ringel, 1997). Victims reported that a third (31%) of these sexual assaults (or 94,000 victimizations) were reported to law enforcement agencies. However, for 1996, the Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) estimated that there were 96,000 forcible rapes alone reported to law enforcement agencies (FBI, 1997). The UCR does not capture reported crime information on other sexual assaults such as forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, and forcible fondling. However, it can be assumed from their relative volume in the NCVS that tens of thousands of sexual assaults other than forcible rape came to the attention of law enforcement in 1996. The large difference between the NCVS and the UCR estimates may reflect differences in the two data collection methods; or, if both estimates are valid, they indicate that many victims of sexual assault are youth under age 12.

Beyond their volume, little is known about the victims, their offenders, and other characteristics of these crimes. However, the UCR's relatively new National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) has the potential to yield detailed descriptions of sexual assaults reported by participating law enforcement agencies. NIBRS captures a wide range of information on each incident of sexual assault reported to law enforcement. This information includes demographic information on all victims, the levels of victim injury, victims' perceptions of offenders' ages, gender, race, and Hispanic ethnicity; and the victim-offender relationships. NIBRS also collects information on all offenses involved in the incident; the types of weapons used; the locations of the incident; the dates and times of the incident; the demographics of arrestees (if any); and the methods of clearance, such as arrest or victim refusal to cooperate with the investigation. To some, the value of the NIBRS data is limited by the small and non-scientific sample of contributing law enforcement agencies. From 1991 through 1996 the sample of reporting agencies increased; however, even the reporting agencies in the 1996 sample were responsible for less than 10% of the U.S. population. While there is no way to assess the national representativeness of the sample, the number of sexual assault victimizations in the NIBRS sample is very large. Therefore, accepting the inherent qualifications associated with any analysis of NIBRS data, the sheer number of reports and the detailed information available on each crime provides researchers and policymakers with a unique opportunity to study the sexual assaults of young children.

The data

The 1991 through 1996 NIBRS master files contain reports from law enforcement agencies in 12 States: Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia. These reports were scanned to identify incidents of sexual assault. The FBI's offense coding structure classifies sexual assault into four separate offense categories. From most to least serious, these crimes are forcible rape, forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, and forcible fondling. If more than one of these offenses occurred, the most severe sexual charge was used to classify the sexual assault in the incident.

To study the sexual assault of young children, two research bases (differing by unit of count) were extracted from the 1991 through 1996 NIBRS master files. One base summarized the information for each of the 60,991 victims of sexual assault, the incident characteristics, and (where available) information on their offender(s). The second base compiled information for each of the 57,762 victim-identified offenders in sexual assault incidents, their victims, and related incident characteristics.

Table 1. Age profile of the victims of sexual assault

Victim age	All sexual assault	Forcible rape	Forcible sodomy	Sexual assault with object	Forcible fondling
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
0 to 5	14.0%	4.3%	24.0%	26.5%	20.2%
6 to 11	20.1	8.0	30.8	23.2	29.3
12 to 17	32.8	33.5	24.0	25.5	34.3
18 to 24	14.2	22.6	8.7	9.7	7.7
25 to 34	11.5	19.6	7.5	8.3	5.0
Above 34	7.4	12.0	5.1	6.8	3.5

Findings

Age of the victims of sexual assault

The most serious sexual assault charge was forcible fondling in 45% of all sexual assaults reported to law enforcement in the 1991 through 1996 NIBRS master files. Incidents of forcible rape were nearly as common (42%), while incidents of forcible sodomy (8%) and sexual assault with an object (4%) were far less frequent. One percent of victims of these crimes was age 54 or older. Seven percent of victims were over age 34 (table 1). Another 12% were ages 25 through 34, and 14% were between ages 18 and 24. The remainder, over two-thirds (67%) of all victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement agencies, were juveniles (under the age of 18 at the time of the crime). More than half of all juvenile victims were under age 12. That is, 33% of all victims of sexual assault reported to law enforcement were ages 12 through 17 and 34% were under age 12.[1] Most disturbing is that one of every seven victims of sexual assault (or 14% of all victims) reported to law enforcement agencies were under age 6.

The age profile of sexual assault victims varied with the nature of the crime. Juveniles were the large majority of the victims of forcible fondling (84%), forcible sodomy (79%), and sexual assault with an object (75%). In contrast, juveniles were the victims in less than half (46%) of forcible rapes. In each sexual assault category except forcible rape, children below the age of 12 were about half of all victims.

The detailed age distribution of the victims of sexual assault emphasizes the high proportion of juvenile victims. The single age with the greatest proportion of sexual assault victims reported to law enforcement was age 14 (figure 1). There were more victims in each individual age group between 3 and 17 than in any individual age group over age

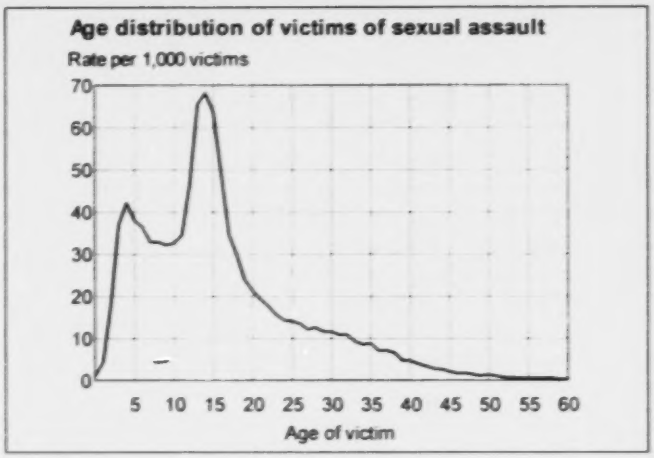

Figure 1

17 (any adult age group), and more victims age 2 than in any age group above age 40. For victims under age 12, 4-year-olds were at greatest risk of being the victim of a sexual assault.

The victim age distribution differed with the nature of the offense (figure 2). The risk of being the victim of forcible rape increased dramatically from age 10 to age 14, where it peaked. By age 20, the risk had dropped to less than half the peak 14-year-old rate, and dropped to a 10th of the 14-year-old peak by age 40. For the other types of sexual assault, the victim age curves had two peaks, one (as in forcible rape) around age 13 or 14 and the other around age 4. The risk of being the victim of forcible sodomy peaked at age 4. By age 11 the risk of forcible sodomy dropped to half the peak rate, then increased for a couple of years through age 13, before falling to a 10th of the peak rate by the early 20s. The risk of being the victim of sexual assault with an object peaked at ages 3 and 4, then fell to less than half the peak rate by age 8. After age 8 the risk of sexual assault with an object increased through age 14 to almost three-fourths the 3- and 4-year-old peak, and then dropped to a 10th of the peak rate by the mid-20s. The risk of forcible fondling, the other high volume sex assault offense along with forcible rape, first peaked at age 4, dropped marginally through the pre-teen years, and then increased to its absolute peak for victims age 13. After age 13, the risk of forcible fondling dropped precipitously, so that by age 24 the risk was a 10th of that of 13-year-olds.

[1]This finding that a third of sexual assault victims reported to law enforcement were under age 12 largely accounts for the discrepancy between the NCVS and the UCR estimates of the number of sexual assaults reported to law enforcement.

Age profiles of sexual assault victims, by offense catagory

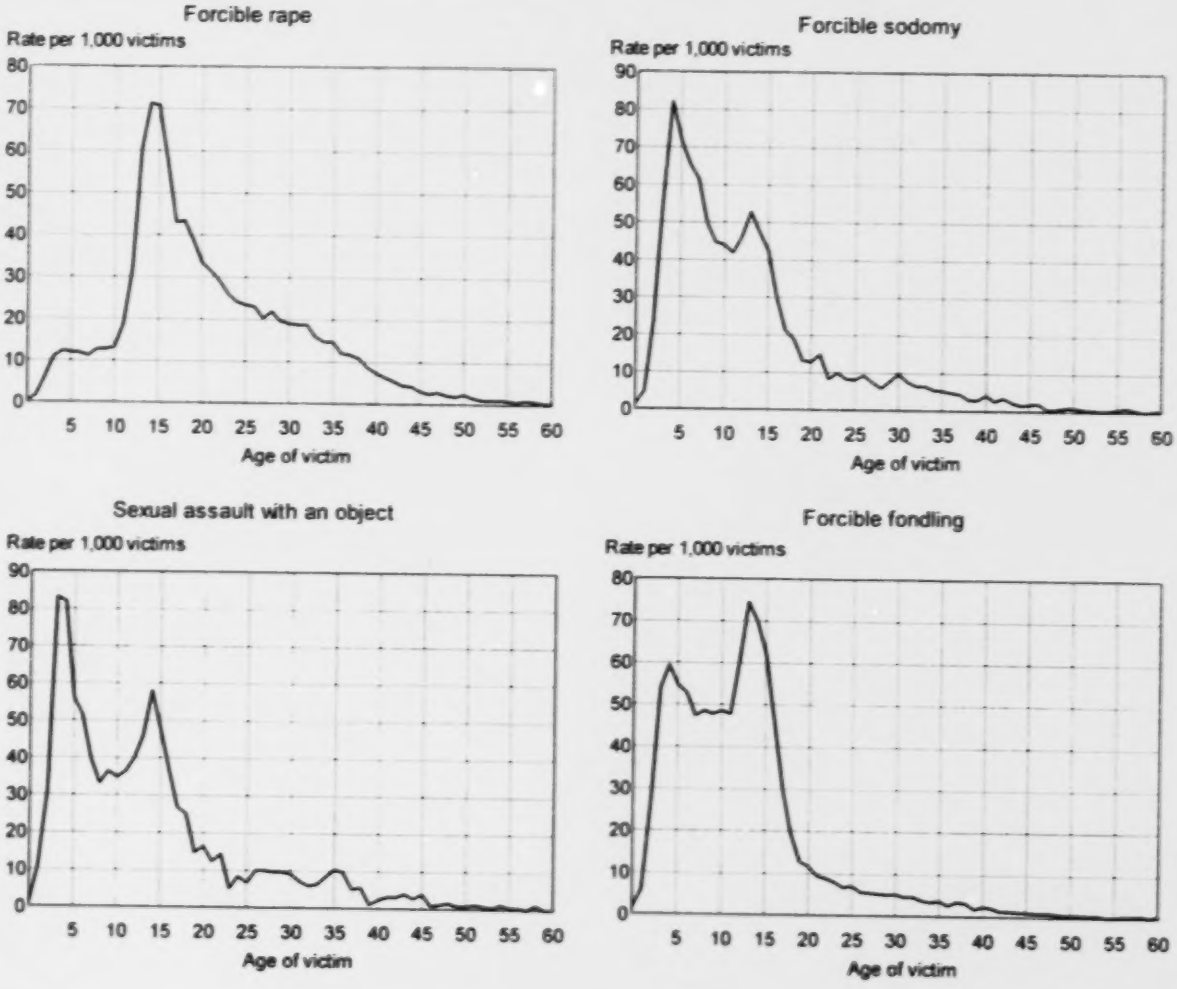

Figure 2

Gender of sexual assault victims

Females were more than six times as likely as males to be the victims of sexual assaults known to law enforcement agencies. More specifically, 86% of all victims of sexual assault were female. The relative proportion of female victims generally increased with age. Sixty-nine percent of victims under age 6 were female, compared with 73% of victims under age 12, and 82% of all juvenile (under age 18) victims. The female proportion of sexual assault victims reached 90% at age 13 and 95% at age 19 (figure 3).

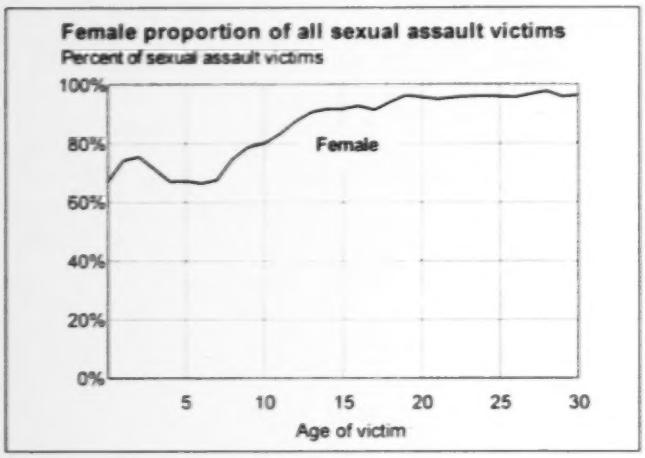

Figure 3

Nearly all forcible rapes (99%) involved a female victim (table 2).[2] Females were the large majority of victims in incidents of sexual assault with an object (87%) and forcible fondling (82%). In contrast, the majority of victims of forcible sodomy (54%) were males. In general, across all specific offense categories, the proportion of female victims increased with the age of the victim. A greater percentage of juvenile sexual assault victims were male (18%) than were adult sexual assault victims (4%). Males were 15% of the juvenile victims of sexual assault with an object, 20% of the juvenile victims of forcible fondling, and 59% of the juvenile victims of forcible sodomy. For victims under age 12, the male proportions were even greater: sexual assault with an object (19%), forcible fondling (26%), and forcible sodomy (64%).

Table 2. Female proportion of sexual assault victims

Victim age	All sexual assaults	Forcible rape	Forcible sodomy	Sexual assault with object	Forcible fondling
All ages	86.2%	98.7%	45.5%	87.4%	81.8%
0 to 5	69.4	93.7	36.7	80.0	70.3
6 to 11	74.9	97.1	36.1	83.2	76.0
12 to 17	90.9	98.5	51.1	92.3	88.8
18 to 24	95.4	99.5	55.5	97.1	91.7
25 to 34	96.1	99.4	67.5	94.7	91.9
Above 34	95.3	99.3	68.4	89.5	90.5

Based on the NIBRS data, the year in a male's life when he is most likely to be the victim of a sexual assault is age 4 (figure 4). By age 17 his risk of victimization has been cut by a factor of 5. A female's year of greatest risk is age 14. Her risk drops to half the peak level by age 17 and to a fifth of the peak level by age 27. At his peak victimization age of 4, a male's risk of sexual assault victimization is just half that of females of the same age. In the later juvenile years (ages 14 to 17), the female victimization rates are at least 10 times greater than the male rates for similar age groups.

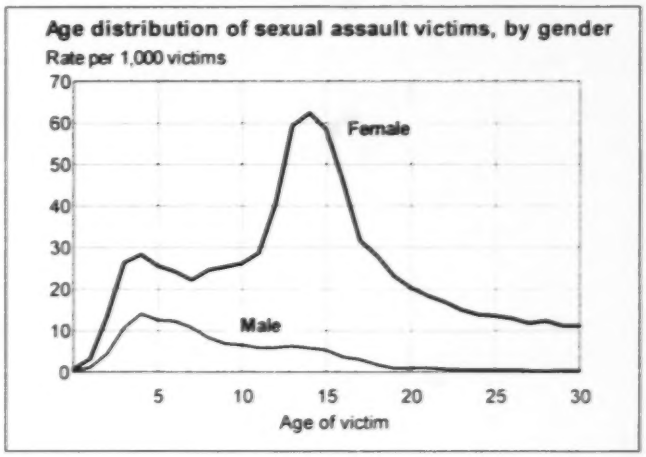

Figure 4

[2]Males can be victims of a forcible rape when the perpetrator is a female.

Other offenses in sexual assault incidents

In 92% of sexual assault victimizations, a single sexual assault was the only crime against the victim recorded for the offender. Crimes against adults were more likely to involve multiple charges than were crimes against juveniles. That is, law enforcement recorded that 16% of all adult sexual assault victims also experienced another offense in the incident, compared with 5% of juvenile victims. Overall, female victims of sexual assault were more likely to experience multiple offenses than were male victims (10% versus 4%). This gender difference was far less for juvenile victims; 5% of female juvenile victims experienced multiple offenses compare with 3% of male juvenile victims. When juvenile victims experienced multiple offenses, the most serious other charge in 47% of the incidents was another sex offense, 21% involved a non-sexual assault, 17% a kidnaping, and in 8% a burglary. When adult victims experienced multiple offenses, in 13% of the incidents the most serious other charge was another sex offense, in 20% a non-sexual assault, in 30% a kidnaping, in 10% a robbery, and in 21% a burglary.

Other victims in sexual assault incidents

When adults were sexually assaulted, the adult was the only victim in the incident in the vast majority of victimizations (96%). Juvenile victimizations were far more likely to include other victims. In 19% of juvenile sexual assault victimizations, the juvenile was victimized along with another individual. Thirteen percent of juvenile victimizations involved a second victim; the remaining 6% involved three or more victims (not necessarily victims of sexual assault).

Younger juvenile victims were more likely than older juvenile victims to be sexually assaulted with other victims. The proportion of youth victimized with others was greater for juvenile victims under age 12 (25%) than for older juveniles (13%). However, within the younger juvenile group, this age-related pattern was reversed; that is, youth ages 6 through 11 were more likely to be victimized with others than were youth under age 6. Twenty-one percent of victims under age 6 were victimized with others compared to 28% of victims ages 6 through 11.

Forcible rapes were more likely to involve a single victim than any other sexual assault. In 94% of forcible rape victimizations, there were no other victims involved,

Table 3. Proportion of sexual assault victims victimized alone

Victim age	All sexual assaults	Forcible rape	Forcible sodomy	Sexual assault with object	Forcible fondling
All ages	85.8%	94.5%	81.1%	85.3%	78.6%
0 to 5	79.0	86.7	77.9	84.8	77.0
6 to 11	72.2	81.0	72.5	72.8	69.9
12 to 17	86.9	93.7	83.6	87.9	81.0
18 to 24	95.1	97.1	93.9	94.6	89.8
25 to 34	96.8	97.9	93.7	97.1	93.6
Above 34	95.1	97.9	96.8	93.0	90.4

compared with 79% of forcible fondling, 81% of forcible sodomy, and 85% of victimizations of sexual assault with an object (table 3). Within each type of sexual assault, juvenile victims were more likely to be victimized with others than were adults. Regardless of the nature of the sexual assault, juveniles under age 12 were more likely than older juveniles to be victimized with others. But, as in the overall pattern, within each detailed offense category, youth ages 6 through 11 were more likely to be victimized with others than were the youngest victims, under age 6.

Females were more likely to be victimized alone than were males. In 96% of adult female sexual assault victimizations, the female was the only victim, compared with 88% of adult male victimizations. This discrepancy held for juvenile victims; in 83% of juvenile female sexual assault victimizations, the female was the only victim, compared with 71% of male victimizations. This discrepancy also held for victims under age 12; females under age 12 were the lone victims in 77% of their sexual assaults compared with 69% of young males. Similar gender differences were found in each specific sexual assault offense category.

When there was more than one victim in the incident, the victims were likely to be of similar ages. This relationship was stronger for juvenile victims than adult victims. In adult victimizations involving more than one victim, 71% percent of the victimizations involved another adult and 35% involved a juvenile victim, with 6% involving both another adult and a juvenile victim. However, in juvenile victimizations with more than one victim, 96% percent of the victimizations involved another juvenile and 6% involved an adult victim, with 2% involving both another juvenile and an adult victim. For victims under age 12 who were victimized with others, 90% of victimizations involved another youth under age 12, 15% involved older juveniles, and 4% involved adult victims.

Location of sexual assault

Most (70%) of the sexual assaults reported to law enforcement occurred in the residence of the victim, the offender, or the residence of another individual. Less than two-thirds of forcible rapes (64%) occur in a residence compared with three-quarters of other sexual assaults: forcible sodomy (74%), sexual assault with an object (76%), and forcible fondling (74%). Sexual assaults against females were less likely to occur in a residence than were those against male victims (69% versus 77%).

Young victims were generally more likely to be victimized in a residence than were older victims (table 4). The age of the victim was strongly related to where the assault occurred. Seventy-seven percent of sexual assaults with juvenile victims occurred in a residence compared with 55% of adult victimizations. Older juveniles were more likely than younger juveniles to be victimized in a location other than a residence. While just 16% of the sexual assaults of youth below the age of 12 occurred in a place other than a residence, 31% of the victimizations of youth ages 12 through 17 occurred in such locations. The most common non-resident locations for sexual assaults of juveniles were roadways, fields/woods, schools, and hotels/motels. For adults the most likely locations after a residence included roadways, fields/woods, hotels/motels, parking lots, and commercial/office buildings.

Table 4. Percent of sexual assault occurring within a residence

Victim age	All sexual assaults	Forcible rape	Forcible sodomy	Sexual assault with object	Forcible fondling
All victims	**69.8%**	**64.2%**	**74.0%**	**76.2%**	**73.7%**
0 to 5	86.7	86.4	84.9	86.1	87.2
6 to 11	82.6	83.3	81.5	84.5	82.4
12 to 17	69.2	68.7	72.7	75.3	68.8
18 to 24	55.1	56.9	52.9	57.4	50.4
25 to 34	53.0	53.4	50.4	58.7	51.0
Above 34	59.8	62.1	54.2	61.4	53.7
Females	**68.7%**	**64.0%**	**74.2%**	**76.6%**	**72.7%**
0 to 5	87.5	86.5	86.1	87.3	88.0
6 to 11	83.3	83.4	85.9	86.0	82.8
12 to 17	69.0	68.5	76.4	75.6	68.5
18 to 24	55.5	57.0	56.8	58.8	50.5
25 to 34	53.0	53.4	48.6	59.2	51.3
Above 34	60.2	62.1	59.8	63.4	52.8
Males	**76.8%**	**76.6%**	**74.0%**	**76.8%**	**78.4%**
0 to 5	85.0	***	84.2	83.3	85.5
6 to 11	80.5	***	79.0	***	81.2
12 to 17	71.6	81.6	69.0	***	71.5
18 to 24	48.5	***	48.1	***	50.0
25 to 34	52.4	***	53.8	***	46.8
Above 34	54.3	***	***	***	***

*** indicates fewer than 100 victimizations

When a juvenile female was the victim of a sexual assault, the incident was almost as likely to occur in a residence as when a juvenile male was the victim. Seventy-six percent of juvenile female victims of sexual assault were victimized in their home or in another residence compared with 80% of juvenile male victims. The proportion of victimizations that occurred in residences was also similar for female and male victims under age 12 (85% versus 83%) and for female and male victims ages 12 through 17 (69% versus 72%).

Weapons in sexual assault

In 93% of sexual assault victimizations the NIBRS data provided information on the most serious weapon used in the incident. In 77% of sexual assaults where the weapon information was available, the only weapon involved was what the FBI label as a *personal weapon* such as hands, feet, or fists. A firearm was used or brandished in just 2% of sexual assault victimizations. Other non-personal weapons such as a knife or club, were used or brandished in another 6% of sexual assaults. In 14% of victimizations the records indicate that no weapon was involved.

The use of a weapon other than a personal weapon increased with the age of the victim. Rarely did the sexual assaults of youth under age 12 involve a firearm. A firearm was involved in just 1% of the sexual assaults of youth ages 12 through 17. Other non-personal weapons were more common in these crimes, being involved in 4% of crimes against both juveniles under age 12 and victims between ages 12 and 17. For adult victims, firearms were a slightly more common attribute of sexual assault, being used in 5% of victimizations. Other non-personal weapons were more common in adult, rather than in juvenile assaults, being used in 11% of the sexual assaults of persons ages 18 and over.

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Time of day of sexual assault

The time of day when sexual assaults occurred was related primarily to the age of the victim (figure 5). For adult victims, sexual assaults were most common between midnight and 2 a.m. From morning through 7 p.m. the number of adult sexual assaults committed in each 1-hour period was essentially constant. The number of adult assaults began to increase in the 8 p.m. hour and increased consistently until the peak in the 2 a.m. hour.[3]

The temporal pattern for the sexual assaults of very young victims, children under age 6, was quite different. For these young victims, the temporal distribution appears to be a combination of two separate distributions. The primary temporal pattern for these crimes has a peak in the 3 p.m. hour. This is also the hour other research has found to be the period when juveniles are most likely to be the victims of violent crime in general (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999). This primary temporal pattern shows a consistent increase in the frequency of sexual assaults of very young victims before 3 p.m. and a consistent decline in the hours after 3 p.m. The secondary temporal pattern for the sexual assaults of very young children shows the hours of 8 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. (traditional meal times) to be periods when the number of sexual assaults of very young victims spike. The temporal patterns of sexual assault of youth ages 6 through 11, and juveniles ages 12 through 17, appear to be a combination of the patterns of the very young, and the adult victims. These temporal distributions combine the after-school and mealtime hour patterns of very young victims and the temporal patterns of sexual assault for adults.

[3]The time of incident information in NIBRS is truncated to the hour, so that a crime that occurred at 2:45 a.m. is coded as a 2 a.m. crime.

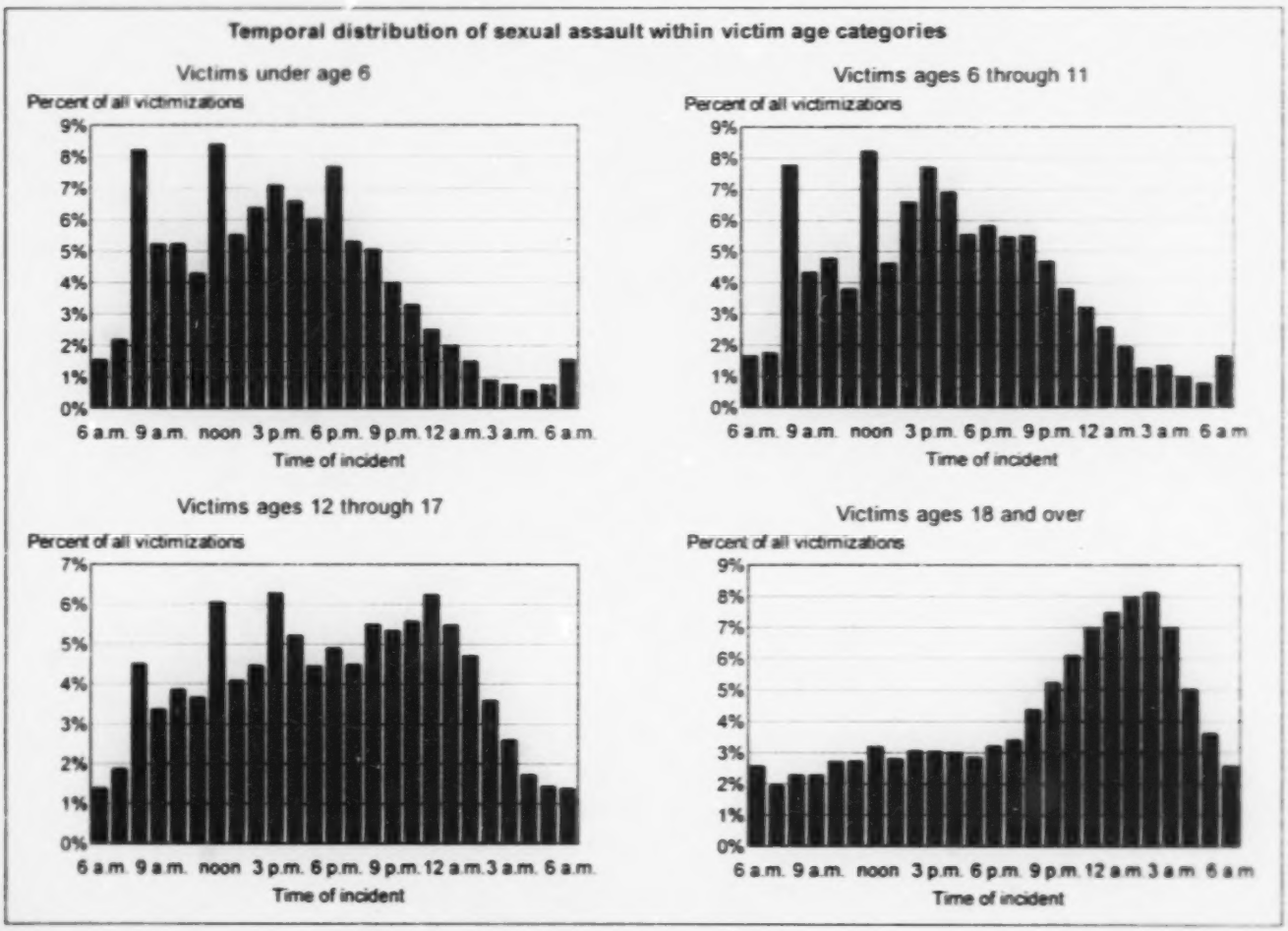

Figure 5

Gender and age of offenders in sexual assault

Nearly all of the offenders in sexual assaults reported to law enforcement were male (96%). Female offenders were most common in assaults against victims under age 6. For these youngest victims, 12% of offenders were females, compared with 6% for victims ages 6 through 12, and 3% for victims ages 12 through 17. Overall, 6% of the offenders who sexually assaulted juveniles were female, compared with just 1% of the female offenders who sexually assaulted adults.

The age profile of offenders in sexual assault varied with the nature of the crime (table 5). Overall, 23% of sexual assault offenders were under age 18 and 77% were adults. Juveniles were a substantially smaller proportion of the offenders in forcible rapes (17%) than in sexual assaults with an object (23%), forcible fondlings (27%), and incidents of forcible sodomy (36%).

Table 5. Age profile of sexual assault offenders

Offender age	All sexual assaults	Forcible rape	Forcible sodomy	Sexual assault with object	Forcible fondling
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Juveniles	**23.2%**	**17.0%**	**36.2%**	**23.4%**	**27.0%**
7 to 11	3.6	1.3	8.2	4.1	5.2
12 to 17	19.5	15.7	28.1	19.3	21.8
Adults	**76.8%**	**83.0%**	**63.8%**	**76.6%**	**73.0%**
18 to 24	21.7	29.1	15.2	17.3	15.8
25 to 34	26.7	30.6	24.3	27.1	23.1
Above 34	28.4	23.4	24.2	32.2	34.1

Sixteen percent of juvenile offenders were under the age of 12. These very young offenders were seldom the offenders in forcible rapes (1% of all offenders and 7% of juvenile offenders), while they made up greater proportions of the juvenile offenders in forcible fondlings (19%), sexual assaults with an object (17%), and forcible sodomies (23%). Young adults (persons 18 through 24) were 22% of adult offenders in forcible fondlings; however, they were 35% of adult offenders in forcible rapes. Correspondingly, adults over age 34 were 28% of all adult offenders in forcible rapes and 47% of the adult offenders in forcible fondlings.

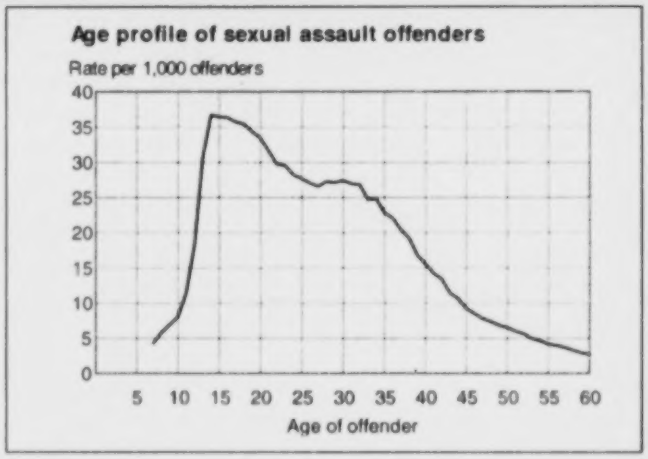

Figure 6

In general, the detailed age profile of offenders in sexual assault crimes shows that the single age with the greatest number of offenders from the perspective of law enforcement was age 14 (figure 6).[4] The frequency of offenders within age groups declined gradually with age, reaching half the peak frequency by the late 30s.

The age profile of offenders varied with the age of the victim (figure 7). Juvenile offenders assaulted 4% of adult victims, while adult offenders assaulted 67% of juvenile victims. Younger juvenile victims tended to have a greater proportion of juvenile offenders than did older juvenile victims. Thirteen percent of offenders of victims under age 6 were ages 7 through 11, and 27% of the offenders of these very young victims were ages 12 through 17. That is, 40% of the offenders of victims under age 6 were themselves juveniles. A similar proportion (39%) of offenders of victims ages 6 through 11 were also juveniles. For older juvenile victims, the proportion of juvenile offenders dropped to 27%.

[4]Analyses of the NIBRS data on age of offender is complicated by the fact that the distribution of ages is greatly affected by the use of age estimates by the victims. See *Appendix A* for more details.

Age profiles of sexual assault offenders within victim age categories

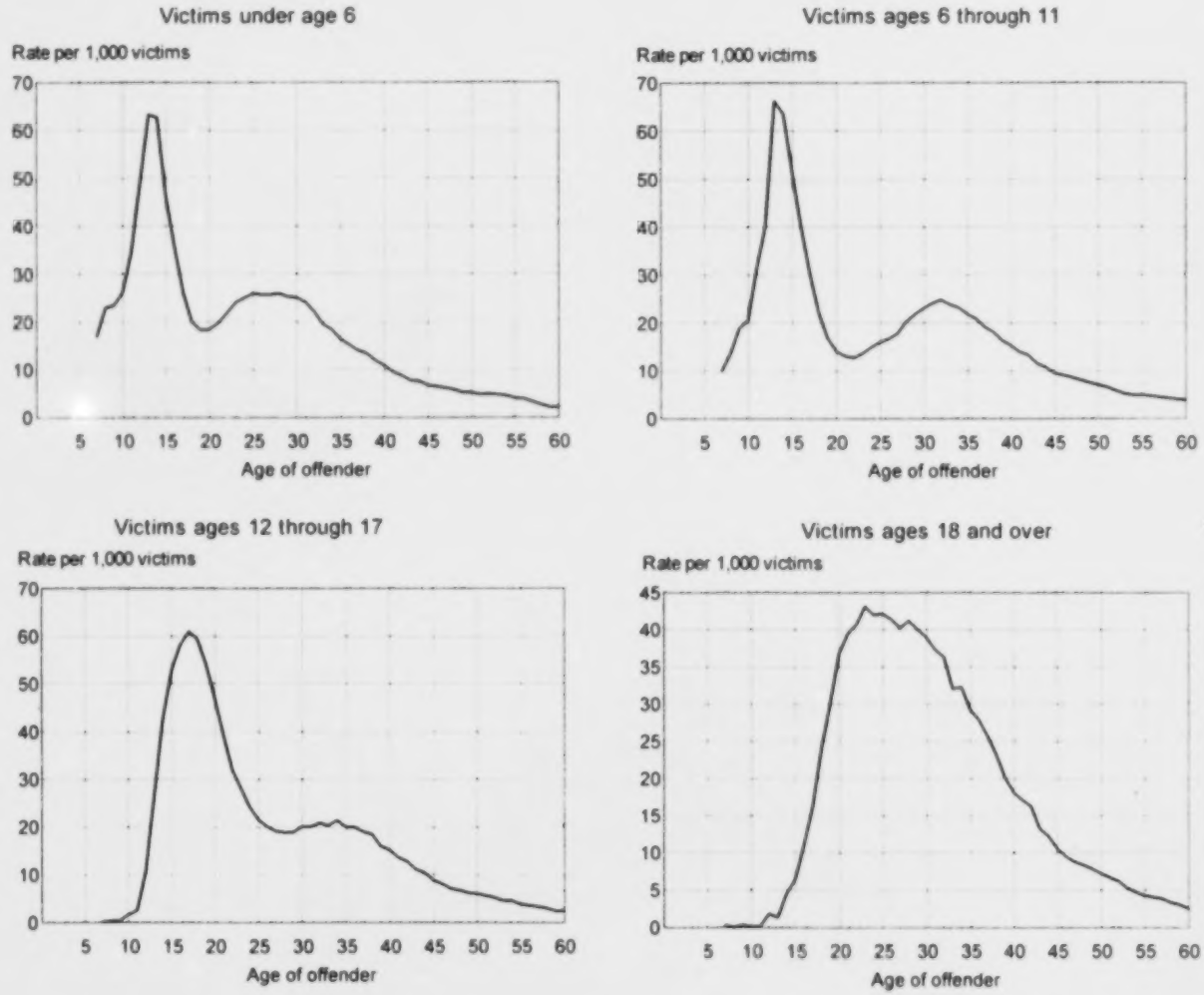

Figure 7

Victim-offender relationships in sexual assault

About one-quarter (27%) of all offenders were family members of their victims (table 6). The offenders of young victims were more likely than the offenders of older victims to be family members. Almost half (49%) of the offenders of victims under age 6 were family members, compared with 42% of the offenders who sexually assaulted youth ages 6 through 11, and 24% of offenders who sexually assaulted juveniles ages 12 through 17. Overall, just 12% of the offenders who sexually assaulted adults were family members of the victims, compared with 34% of the offenders of juvenile victims.

Table 6. Victim-offender relationship in sexual assault

		Offenders		
Victim age	Total	Family member	Acquaintance	Stranger
All victims	**100.0%**	**26.7%**	**59.6%**	**13.8%**
Juveniles	**100.0%**	**34.2%**	**58.7%**	**7.0%**
0 to 5	100.0	48.6	48.3	3.1
6 to 11	100.0	42.4	52.9	4.7
12 to 17	100.0	24.3	66.0	9.8
Adults	**100.0%**	**11.5%**	**61.1%**	**27.3%**
18 to 24	100.0	9.8	66.5	23.7
Above 24	100.0	12.8	57.1	30.1

Except for victims under age 6, most sexual assault offenders were not family members but were otherwise known to the victim. Sixty percent of all sexual assault offenders were classified by law enforcement as acquaintances of the victim. Just 14% of offenders were strangers to their victims. Strangers were a greater proportion of the offenders of adult victims (27%) than juvenile victims (7%). The youngest juveniles were least likely to have an offender who was a stranger. Just 3% of the offenders in the sexual assaults of children under age 6 were strangers, compared with 5% of the offenders of youth ages 6 through 12, and 10% of offenders of juveniles ages 12 through 17.

In general, the victim-offender relationships were similar for male and female victims; however, there were differences in the offender profiles for victims under age 12 (table 7). Compared with young male victims, a greater proportion of female victims under age 12 was assaulted by family members. For male victims under age 12, 40% of offenders were family members compared with 47% of the offenders of females under age 12.

Table 7. Victim-offender relationship in sexual assault, by victim gender

		Offenders		
Victim age	Total	Family member	Acquaintance	Stranger
Female victims	**100.0%**	**25.7%**	**59.5%**	**14.7%**
Juveniles	100.0%	33.9	58.7	7.5
0 to 5	100.0	51.1	45.9	3.0
6 to 11	100.0	43.8	51.4	4.8
12 to 17	100.0	24.3	65.7	10.0
Adults	100.0%	11.5	61.0	27.5
18 to 24	100.0	9.8	66.4	23.8
Above 24	100.0	12.9	56.9	30.2
Male victims	**100.0%**	**32.8%**	**59.8%**	**7.3%**
Juveniles	100.0%	35.8	59.2	5.0
0 to 5	100.0	42.4	54.1	3.5
6 to 11	100.0	37.7	57.7	4.6
12 to 17	100.0	23.7	68.7	7.6
Adults	100.0%	11.3	63.9	24.8
18 to 24	100.0	10.7	68.4	20.9
Above 24	100.0	11.8	60.3	27.9

Offender profiling

Using NIBRS data, it is possible to develop probability statements about the characteristics of the offenders given certain characteristics of the incident (table 8). For example, knowing that a victim under age 6 was assaulted in a residence, the NIBRS data indicate that the most likely offender was a juvenile acquaintance age 12 through 17 (probability 15.2%) or a family member age 25 through 34 (probability 15.0%). When a very young victim was assaulted some place other than a residence, the probability that the offender was an adult family member declines, while the probability that the offender was a juvenile acquaintance under age 12 increases substantially. When the victim was a little older (ages 6 through 11) and assaulted in some place other than a residence, the likelihood that the offender was a juvenile acquaintance increases even more (probability 41.0%).

The offenders of adolescents (victims ages 12 through 17) were 5 times more likely to be adult family members when the crime was committed in a residence than when it was committed elsewhere (table 9). The probability that the offender was a juvenile age 12 through 17 was twice as great when the crime occurred outside of a residence. For adult victims, the offender profile was also related to the location of the crime. Offenders of adult victims were 3 times more likely to be adult strangers when the crime occurred outside of a residence than when it occurred inside a residence.

Probability of arrest and clearance

The NIBRS data indicate that an arrest was made in 27% of all sexual assault victimizations. There were only minor offense-related differences in arrest probabilities: forcible rape (25%), forcible sodomy (30%), sexual assault with an object (28%), and forcible fondling (27%). Crimes were also cleared by means other than arrest, or what the FBI has labeled *clearances by exceptional means*. More specifically, in 7% of sexual assault victimizations the victim refused to cooperate. Prosecution was declined in 6% of sexual assaults, implying that there was insufficient evidence to charge or convict the offender. In a small proportion of cases, the offender had died, making arrest impossible. Overall, in the NIBRS sample, 42% of all sexual assaults were cleared by law enforcement through arrest or by exceptional means.[5]

In general, the assaults of juvenile victims were more likely to result in an arrest (29%) than were adult victimizations (22%). Assaults against the youngest victims were the least likely of juvenile victimizations to result in arrest. An offender was arrested in just 19% of the sexual assaults of children under age 6, compared to 33% of victims ages 6 through 11, and 32% of victims ages 12 through 17. In all, arrest probabilities were similar in victimizations of children under age 6 and of adults, while the probability of arrest was greater when the victim was between the ages of 6 and 17.

One factor in the relatively lower arrest probability for crimes against adult victims can be found in a study of clearances by other means. When considering both arrest and other

[5]It should be noted that 41% of forcible rapes in the NIBRS data were cleared by arrests or exceptional means, a level below the national figure of 52% reported by the FBI in *Crime in the United States 1996*.

Table 8. Offender probabilities in a typical 1,000 cases of sexual assault against youth under age 12, by offense locality, offender age, and relationship to victim

Number of victims under age 6 assaulted in a residence

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	43	73	3
12 to 17	123	152	6
18 to 24	80	63	3
25 to 34	150	87	6
Over 34	133	77	2

Number of victims under age 6 assaulted elsewhere

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	23	157	14
12 to 17	50	165	12
18 to 24	54	62	12
25 to 34	107	96	22
Over 34	80	114	34

Number of victims ages 6 to 11 assaulted in a residence

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	20	49	1
12 to 17	129	155	5
18 to 24	37	53	4
25 to 34	127	94	5
Over 34	167	145	7

Number of victims ages 6 to 11 assaulted elsewhere

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	16	185	15
12 to 17	40	225	37
18 to 24	18	68	17
25 to 34	48	73	27
Over 34	65	123	41

Table 9. Offender probabilities in a typical 1,000 cases of sexual assault against victims over age 11, by offense locality, victim-offender age and relationship

Number of victims ages 12 to 17 assaulted in a residence

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	1	3	0
12 to 17	30	169	11
18 to 24	35	219	16
25 to 34	79	123	11
Over 34	180	116	7

Number of victims ages 12 to 17 assaulted elsewhere

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	0	7	0
12 to 17	8	329	45
18 to 24	9	220	57
25 to 34	15	94	50
Over 34	31	97	37

Number of victims ages 18 or above assaulted in a residence

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	0	0	0
12 to 17	5	23	8
18 to 24	19	180	40
25 to 34	62	252	59
Over 34	91	231	31

Number of victims ages 18 or above assaulted elsewhere

Offender age	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
7 to 11	0	0	0
12 to 17	0	20	14
18 to 24	7	157	107
25 to 34	18	208	169
Over 34	22	180	98

exceptional means, the probability that adult victimizations were cleared (39%) was closer to the clearance probabilities for crimes against victims ages 6 through 11 (45%) and victims ages 12 through 17 (45%). These clearance probabilities were more similar than the arrest probabilities because a much larger proportion of adult crimes were classified as cleared by law enforcement when the victim refused to cooperate. However, even when considering all means of clearances, the youngest victims (under age 6) still had the smallest proportion of their victimizations cleared by law enforcement (34%).

The probability that an offender would be arrested or the matter cleared by arrest or exceptional means was largely unrelated to the offender's age (figure 8). The only age-related difference was for very young offenders. While the crimes of very young offenders were far less likely to result in arrest than were those of other offenders, the proportion of their crimes cleared were similar. The reason for this pattern is that law enforcement considered many of these crimes to be cleared because the offender had been identified, but due to the young age of the offender no arrest was made.

Correlates of the probability of arrest

While age of the offender was differentially related to the likelihood of arrest, only for the very young offender, other incident characteristics were correlated with the probability of arrest and the probability that the offense would be otherwise cleared by law enforcement. Based on the results of a logistic regression, the factors that had the largest influence on the probability of arrest (in order of their odds ratios) were —

- the number of victims in the incident — with more than one victim increasing arrest probabilities
- the number of offenders in the incident — with incidents with just one offender increasing arrest probabilities
- the age of the victim — with juvenile victims increasing arrest probabilities
- the sex of the victim — with male victims decreasing arrest probabilities.

Other incident characteristics that influenced the probability of arrest to a lesser degree, but still remained statistically significant were —

- the relationship of the victim and the offender — with offenders who were strangers decreasing arrest probabilities
- the location of the incident — with incidents occurring outside of residences decreasing arrest probabilities

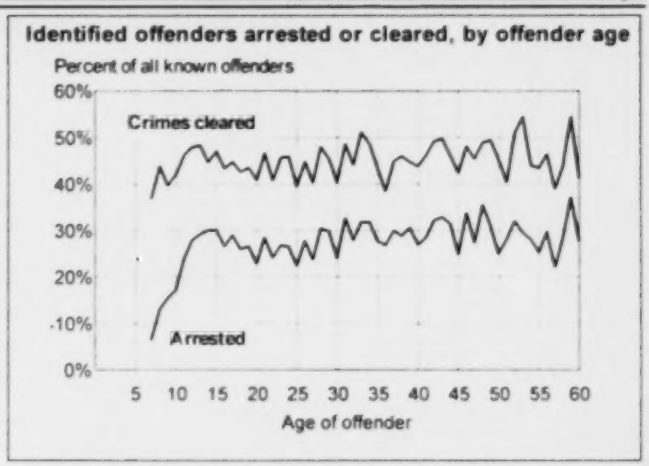

Figure 8

- the injury to the victim — with incidents in which the victim was injured decreasing arrest probabilities.

These correlates were roughly similar for predictions of clearances with one exception. Incidents with offenders who were known to the victim were substantially more likely to be cleared than those in which the offender was a stranger to the victim. This difference between the arrests and clearance correlates reflects those incidents in which the offender is known to the victim but the victim refuses to cooperate with law enforcement.

Summary and conclusions

Based on NIBRS data, crimes against juvenile victims are the large majority (67%) of sexual assaults handled by law enforcement agencies. One of every seven victims was under the age of 6, and over a third of all sexual assaults involved a victim who was under the age of 12. This implies that by design the National Crime Victimization Survey is missing over a third of all sexual assaults that occur in the United States each year. The only large, multi-jurisdictional source of information on these crimes, therefore, is the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

With the more complete view of sexual assault patterns in the NIBRS data, the characteristics of sexual assaults of young juveniles can be differentiated from those of older juveniles and adults. Juvenile victims of sexual assault were more likely to be male (18%) than were adult victims (4%). Nearly a quarter (27%) of the victims under age 12 were male. Juveniles under the age of 12 were about half of all the victims of forcible sodomy, sexual assault with an object, and forcible fondling and about an eighth of all victims of forcible rape reported to law enforcement agencies.

Juvenile victims were more likely to be victimized with others than were adults. One of every five juvenile victims of sexual assault were victimized in incidents with more than one victim, while just 4% of adult sexual assault victims were victimized with others. Juveniles under 12 were far more likely to be victimized in groups than were older juveniles; 25% of these young juveniles were victimized with others, compared to 13% of older juvenile victims. When juveniles under the age of 12 were victimized with others, 90% of victimizations involved other victims under age 12, 15% involved older juvenile victims, and 4% also involved adult victims.

Nearly 5 of every 6 sexual assaults of young juveniles occurred in a residence. Crimes against older juveniles and, especially, adult victims were far more likely to occur in other places. Weapons other than the offender's hands and feet were rarely used in the sexual assault of young juveniles. The temporal pattern of sexual assault shows that unlike adults, young juveniles are at highest risk of sexual assault in the hours when meals are served and after school.

Adults were the offenders in 60% of the sexual assaults of youth under age 12. Rarely were the offenders of young juvenile victims strangers. Strangers were the offenders in just 3% of sexual assaults against victims under age 6 and 5% of the sexual assault victimizations of youth ages 6 through 11. Sexual assaults of children under the age of 6 were the least likely of all such crimes to result in arrest or be otherwise cleared. The NIBRS data indicate that law enforcement identified the offender in just a third (34%) of the sexual assaults of children under age 6 and nearly half (45%) of the victimizations of youth ages 6 through 11.

In all, the characteristics of the large number of sexual assaults of youth under age 12 differ on significant dimensions from the sexual assaults of older juveniles and adult victims. This substantial component of America's crime problem has been characterized by subjective assessments or atypical high profile crimes for too long. NIBRS data provide policymakers (especially in the communities where NIBRS-compatible, management information systems exist) with the information required to make empirically-based judgments about the scope and characteristics of sexual crimes against our youngest citizens. With this critical information, justice professionals and policymakers can focus their energies on possible interventions designed to reduce this very serious crime that affects the most vulnerable of our children and causes lifelong problems for its victims.

NIBRS definitions of forcible sex offenses

Forcible sex offenses Any sexual act directed against another person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity.

Forcible rape (except "statutory rape") The carnal knowledge of a person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity. If force was used or threatened, the crime should be classified as forcible rape regardless of the age of the victim. If no force was used or threatened and the victim was under the statutory age of consent, the crime should be classified as statutory rape.

Forcible sodomy Oral or anal sexual intercourse with another person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity.

Sexual assault with an object To use an object or instrument to unlawfully penetrate, however slightly, the genital or anal opening of the body of another person, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity. An "object" or "instrument" is anything used by the offender other than the offender's genitalia. Examples are a finger, bottle, handgun, stick, etc.

Forcible fondling The touching of the private body parts of another person for the purpose of sexual gratification, forcibly and/or against that person's will; or not forcibly or against the person's will where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity. Forcible fondling includes "indecent liberties" and "child molesting." Because forcible fondling is an element of forcible rape, forcible sodomy, and sexual assault with an object, it should be reported only if it is the sole forcible sex offense committed against a victim.

Appendix A

Law enforcement may report the victim's perception of offender age as a point estimate or as a range. This results in two analysis problems. First, victims often express the offender's age as 5-year age range, for example, 25 to 30. In such instances, the NIBRS data record the midpoint of the range which would be 27. In other situations the victim gives a specific age, but these estimates are most likely to fall on ages divisible by 5, such as 20, 25, 30, 35. Both of these response patterns create artificial peaks, one at 5-year points and one between 5-year points. A presentation of the raw NIBRS data on offender age confirms this peaking in the data. For presentation in this paper, the offender age data were smoothed.

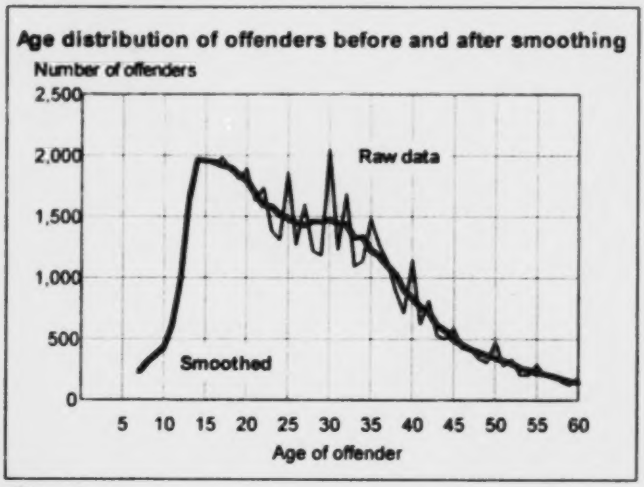

Figure A

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